

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 002262

SIPDIS

LONDON FOR GURNEY
PARIS FOR NEARY

E.O.12958: DECL: 07/29/12

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: LAGOS GOVERNOR SAYS OBASANJO NEEDS A
PDP-AD ALLIANCE

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter. Reason 1.5
(B) AND (D).

1. Summary: (C) During a July 5 meeting with Ambassador Jeter, Lagos State Governor Bola Tinubu stated that President Obasanjo was in deep trouble politically. Reelection hinged on a deal with Tinubu's Alliance for Democracy (AD). However, Tinubu claimed Obasanjo was still trying to assert PDP supremacy in the Southwest and was hurting his position within the PDP itself by allowing his relationship with VP Atiku to drift. Regarding 2003 presidential and gubernatorial races, Tinubu claimed the AD would hold the Southwest while gaining strong support in populous states like Kaduna, Plateau and Benue. Closer to home, Tinubu felt he would win reelection handily. End Summary.

OBASANJO IN THE SOUTHWEST - A FIGHT TO AVOID

2. (C) Surveying the political landscape, Tinubu saw Obasanjo wandering into a dense thicket yet failing to appreciate the depth of his electoral troubles. For example, the Governor declared Obasanjo was unpopular in Lagos despite his Yoruba bloodlines. When the President visited the city to deliver the University of Lagos graduation address, Tinubu was in meetings until after 4 a.m. to convince student leaders to shelve a mass protest against Obasanjo. Tinubu remembered the students were vitriolic; only his appeal not to embarrass Lagos and the university finally won the day. The student's dislike for the President, he added, was echoed throughout Lagos. Few people have a good word for Obasanjo.

3. (C) Attributing Obasanjo's woes to his inability to listen to independent advice and his lack of interpersonal skills, Tinubu portrayed the President as a myopic bull in a crowded china shop. Despite Obasanjo's flaws as a politician and their memberships in different parties, Tinubu said they remained personal friends. Also, despite Obasanjo's ebbing popularity, Tinubu acknowledged the AD had not shut the door on cooperating with him.

4. (C) Before the AD could cooperate, Obasanjo would have to call off the PDP dogs in Southwest. Tinubu thought Obasanjo knew the Southwest was vital to his reelection. However, Obasanjo's personal pride was obscuring the best tack for securing the region's support. Instead, of attempting a frontal assault to wrest the Southwest from the AD, Obasanjo should seek an AD-PDP alliance. Obasanjo's reliance on PDP National Deputy Chairman for the Southwest Bode George was unfortunate. George was telling Obasanjo the PDP could win by playing hardball. Tinubu scoffed that George was highly unpopular, particularly since many suspected his involvement in Justice Minister Bola Ige's assassination. The more prominent George and his confrontational tactics became, the less Obasanjo had a chance of carrying the Southwest as a bloc.

5. (C) Tinubu continued that AD governors would not help extend Obasanjo's tenancy in Aso Rock while PDP challengers were trying to oust them from the various gubernatorial mansions. The AD was so entrenched that the PDP would not win many converts in the region despite the party's aggressive approach. "The AD could run a dog for election in Lagos and still win!" Tinubu hyperbolized. Conversely, lack of AD support could cause an otherwise credible candidate to lose in the

region. Thus, while the PDP might win a few local government seats, Obasanjo and the PDP were essentially barking up the wrong tree by trying to oust the AD from its Southwest stronghold.

16. (C) Reviewing the state of play in Nigeria's other geopolitical zones, Tinubu explained why Obasanjo needed an AD alliance. The Northwest and Southeast opposed the President. The Supreme Court decision on oil resource allocation also has pitted the littoral states of the South-South against the Administration, particularly since the decision resulted from a case instigated by the Federal Government. Unless Obasanjo cut a resource allocation deal with those states, he would lose them; moreover, Obasanjo is in trouble with the populous Tiv of the Middle Belt due to last October's massacre of civilians in Benue State. On the positive side, Obasanjo only can count on the Northeast because Vice President Atiku is from Adamawa and on predominately Christian areas in the upper reaches of the Middle Belt.

THE AD -- SPREADING BEYOND THE SOUTHWEST

17. (C) For reelection, Tinubu said Obasanjo must secure the Southwest as well as regain support in the Middle Belt and South-South. A deal with the AD would give Obasanjo the first (the Southwest) and place him in position to secure the second and third objectives. Attempting to show how the AD could help Obasanjo, Tinubu stated his party has made headway at the local and gubernatorial level beyond the immediate Southwest. He claimed well-known businessman Great Ogboru could snatch Edo State from the PDP incumbent Lucky Igbenidion. Also many Yoruba were decamping from the APP (now ANPP) and the PDP in predominantly-Yoruba Kwara State, due primarily to the squabble over the enthronement of a Yoruba Oba to counter the existence of the Emir of Ilorin. (The Emir belongs to the Hausa-Fulani hierarchy; many Kwara Yoruba resent a Hausa-Fulani being the preeminent local traditional ruler in a majority Yoruba area.) Beyond gaining ground in Kwara and Edo, two states on Yoruba-land's periphery, Tinubu contended the AD had made advances in Plateau State where its popular candidate David Sango was in position to topple the embattled Joshua Dariye. Tinubu also listed Borno and Nassarawa as states that could fall to the AD. He felt that AD support in Kaduna was growing, and AD support could ensure that pivotal state, in some ways a microcosm of Nigeria itself, remained in Obasanjo's camp.

18. (C) The collaboration between the Yoruba and Tiv which dates back to Olufemi Awolowo and Joseph Tarka, respectively, meant a deal with the AD would help Obasanjo regain some Tiv support notwithstanding last October's massacre of civilians. By making inroads in the states mentioned above, the AD could help Obasanjo take the Middle Belt as well as the Southwest.

19. (C) However, Tinubu stressed AD cooperation would not come cheaply. The AD would require important Cabinet and sub-Cabinet posts. Moreover, Obasanjo must stop behaving autocratically. He would have to show he was "willing to get out of his ivory tower and listen sometimes." With such a deal Obasanjo could spend his time globetrotting and acting like an "international statesman while letting others run things," Tinubu said half-jokingly. He added that any deal on oil revenue allocation with the South-South must include both Ondo and Lagos because these AD-controlled States had off-shore oil reserves, albeit much smaller than those of the Delta states.

110. (C) Tinubu questioned whether Obasanjo had the sagacity to cut a deal with the AD. Obasanjo was ill served by his top campaign advisors, the Governor maintained. For reasons that remain unclear, Obasanjo reposed great confidence in Works and Housing Minister Tony Anenih, the de facto campaign manager. Having Anenih as a key advisor was like inviting "an unfriendly cobra into the bedroom." The Governor recounted how Anenih as Chairman of the SDP, after receiving a pay-off from Head of State Babangida, supported the annulment of the 1993 election even though the SDP's Moshood Abiola had won. Anenih was now advising Obasanjo that he could deliver most of the Governors if the President let him apply the

screws to the state executives. However, the assumption that support of the Governors, especially coerced support, would carry a state's electorate was a tenuous leap in logic. For instance, Tinubu forecasted Katsina Governor Yar a'dua (PDP) would be reelected by a handsome margin but Obasanjo would be rejected in Katsina. Kano Governor Kwankwaso might eke by, but Obasanjo's chances in Kano were dismal. Tinubu expressed the same reservations about Kebbi State and purported Obasanjo supporter Governor Aliero.

OBASANJO NEEDS ATIKU

11. (C) Tinubu claimed Anenih's efforts to hitch Obasanjo to the coattails of the governors while ignoring Vice President Atiku was bad strategy since Atiku was more popular with party faithful than Obasanjo. Tinubu mischievously hoped Obasanjo would ditch Atiku. This move would place the President under heavy attack at the PDP convention. Given his flinty disposition, the President would just say, "To hell with it and all of you," then stomp back to his "chicken farm in Ogun State where he belongs." An incumbent President failing to win his party's nomination would be a good tonic for Nigerian democracy, Tinubu thought.

12. (C) Because of his control of the PDP grassroots machine, Atiku was Obasanjo's greatest asset within the PDP, according to Tinubu. The Governor previously had advised Obasanjo that Atiku was loyal and that he should maintain a close relationship with his Vice President. However, attentive to the whispers of Anenih and NSA Aliyu Mohammed, Obasanjo had allowed his relationship with Atiku to atrophy. Now, Obasanjo was treating the individual he needed most like an unwanted stepchild. Ditch Atiku, lose the nomination, Tinubu iterated.

13. (C) Closer to home, Tinubu was confident he would win reelection in Lagos State despite the defection and open hostility of his Deputy Governor. He believed his performance has been sufficiently credible and that AD would remain preeminent in Lagos State. He predicted Deputy Governor Bucknor would decamp to the ANPP, a party where she had her political home before, to run against him. He discounted her threat and felt the PDP opposition would also be minimal; no eminent Lagosian wanted to contest against the AD in what would be a very steep uphill battle.

Comment

14. (C) While his view probably overestimated AD strength in the Southwest and its inroads in other parts of the country, Tinubu offered a rational, insightful analysis of presidential electoral politics. Like Tinubu, we believe significant opposition awaits Obasanjo in the Southeast and Northwest. The Middle Belt and South-South will be the decisive battlegrounds but only if Obasanjo first has the Southwest in his grasp. Unlike 1999, it is difficult to imagine a scenario where Obasanjo is reelected without carrying his home region. While Obasanjo needs the Southwest, some Yoruba politicians seem to be drawing the pragmatic conclusion that they also need him. They may need to hitch themselves to him to prevent the Southwest from being shut out of national politics by the potential North-Southeastern axis that might emerge from among the other opposition parties. In Nigerian politics, blood still appears to be thicker than water it seems. Thus, a flawed Obasanjo may be better than no Yoruba at all. This is the unspoken subtext of Tinubu's exposition. In short, Obasanjo and the Yoruba-dominated AD are natural allies in an electoral milieu heavily influenced by ethnic, regional and historical factors.